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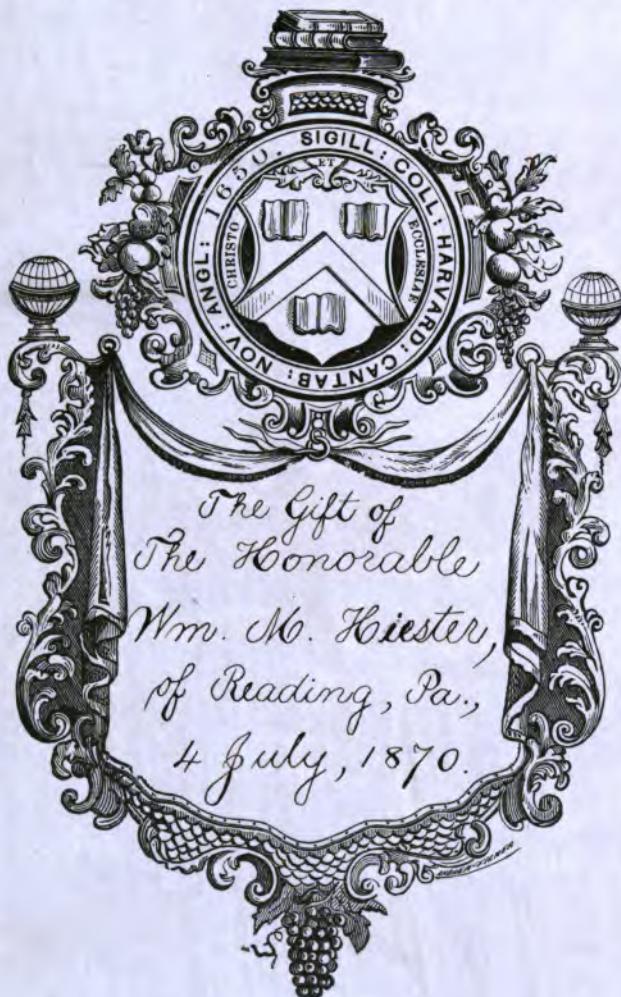


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Bd. Dec. 1870.



*School of the Union, Lancaster
from George Hester*

THE PLACE

OF

The Ringgold Light Artillery

OF READING,

AMONG THE FIRST FIVE COMPANIES FROM PENNSYLVANIA
WHICH MARCHED TO THE DEFENSE OF WASHINGTON,

APRIL, 1861.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BERKS
COUNTY, JUNE 14, 1870.

By William Schuylberg Hester.

Reading, Pa.:
Printed by order of the Society,
1870.

~~RECORDED~~
U.S., 16912, 10, 14

1870, July 4.
Left

Hon. Wm. M. Hiester,
of Reading, Pa.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF BERKS COUNTY,
Reading, June 14, 1870.

At a meeting of the Society, held this evening, JESSE G. HAWLEY, Vice-President, in the chair, on motion of HENRY MAY KEIM, it was unanimously

Resolved, That the thanks of the Society are due to HON. WM. M. HIESTER, the President, for the interesting paper he has read relating to the Ringgold Light Artillery of Reading, and that, as the subject is one of general interest to our citizens, as well as of historical importance, the paper be printed for the use of the Society.

From the minutes,

Attest,

H. MALTZBERGER, Secretary.

GENTLEMEN :

I propose, in the paper which I read this evening before the Historical Society of Berks County, to vindicate the truth of history, and to establish the right of priority to be with the Ringgold Light Artillery, in the contest for precedence that has sprung up between the first five companies from Pennsylvania, which marched to the defense of Washington.

On the 4th of July, 1866, at a military celebration of the Anniversary of our Independence, held at Philadelphia, it was understood that the five companies, the Ringgold Light Artillery, from Reading; the Logan Guards, from Lewistown; the Washington Artillery and the National Light Infantry, from Pottsville, and the Allen Rifles, from Allentown, would be present to participate, and the question of precedence in these companies being likely to arise, General Hoffman addressed a letter to Adjutant General Russell for information on this point. General Russell wrote the following letter, a copy of which he kindly furnished from his office :

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT,
Harrisburg, June 23, 1866.

BRIG. GEN. J. W. HOFFMAN, *Philadelphia*:

"GENERAL :—On my return to-day from Williamsport I found on my table your letter of the 20th inst. I did not take charge of this department until September, 1861, and did not come to Harrisburg until June of that year, from which latter date until September I was on duty as aid-de-camp to the Governor. I am therefore unable to furnish any personal knowledge of the "reporting for duty or muster" of the five companies of which you write, and as no records of them under the title given can be discovered, I cannot give you the transcripts desired. Colonel Slifer, however, Secretary of the Commonwealth, who at that period was actively assisting the Governor in the Military Department, is clear in his recollection of the fact that the "Logan Guards," from Lewistown, was the first to report for duty, this company having reported in the morning or forenoon of the 17th of April, 1861, and the other companies at later periods of the same day.

' I am also informed that this company occupied the right of the line on their march through Baltimore. This, if so, was at that time, when facts and circumstances were fresh and properly understood, a concession of seniority.

I am, &c., &c.,

A. L. RUSSELL, *Adj't Gen. Penna.*"

The Adjutant General in his letter is equally at fault in his information about the line of march in Baltimore, as in the information he communicates from the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The truth is, the U. S. Regulars occupied the right of the line, and the Ringgold Light Artillery the left. But in the confusion and danger of the passage of the unarmed troops through the infuriate mob at Baltimore, little regard was had to the order of march.

Whatever other facts and considerations entered into the decision then made, it cannot be doubted that this letter controlled the result, and the military authorities on this occasion decided upon giving the right of the line to the Logan Guards of Lewistown. On the announcement of this order through Major General Hancock in command, the Ringgold Light Artillery refused to participate in the parade and withdrew. Thus the post of honor and of priority was established by this precedent against the Ringgold Light Artillery most unexpectedly, though not unaccountably.

When I have presented, as I shall do in the performance of the task I have undertaken, the statement of facts and proofs at my command, it will be evident that had Adj't Gen. Russell examined the records and papers within his reach, and not relied upon the treacherous recollection of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, he would not have misled the military authorities at Philadelphia with the erroneous statement that the Logan Guards was the first company to report at Harrisburg, having arrived on the morning of the 17th of April, when the indubitable fact was, that the Ringgold Light Artillery had arrived and reported at Harrisburg on the evening of the 16th of April.

But the question now assumes a higher significance and importance than a mere point of military precedence, and arises to the dignity of a national historical question. In the House

of Representatives at Washington General Cake, a representative from Schuylkill County, who himself, as an officer of the "National Light Infantry," of Pottsville, marched with his company to Washington, in his remarks made upon the introduction of a resolution relative to the bestowal of medals upon the battalion first to arrive at Washington from Pennsylvania, as I find in the report of the *Congressional Globe* of the 18th of April, 1870, said :

"The services of the Lewistown Logan Guards, Captain Selheimer, were offered the Governor on the 15th of April, accepted the same day, and eighty-five strong, marched to Harrisburg on the 16th, the first to arrive in that city."

Some excuse may be found for the error into which the Secretary of the Commonwealth fell in giving his recollection in 1866 of the date of the arrival of the first five companies at Harrisburg, but I can find no excuse or justification for the falsification of history by General Cake, after the publication of the text and notes of "Bates' History of Pennsylvania Volunteers," which appeared in 1869.

It was impossible that the Ringgold Light Artillery or their friends or the friends of historic truth could rest content with this unjust military decision, and with the falsification of history upon the floor of Congress, upon a point of so much interest and so much pride to soldiers and citizens.

At the request of Major James McKnight, I cheerfully accompanied Major Muhlenberg, a member of the corps, to examine the records and proofs bearing upon this controversy at Harrisburg. The result of our searches was so satisfactory and so conclusive, that for the purpose of closing up this pending question of military precedence, and of establishing historic truth in behalf of our own brave soldiers, I determined to prepare this paper on the subject, to be read before the Society and to be placed among its archives.

President Lincoln issued his proclamation for 75,000 men April 15, 1861. On that morning the Ringgold Light Artillery were drilling with full ranks, armed and equipped, on their parade ground, a short distance from the city, when telegraphic news reached the corps on parade of the proclamation of the

President. The following dispatch was forthwith sent to Governor Curtin and appears in the record of dispatches in the office of the Adjutant General at Harrisburg :

HARRISBURG, April 15, 1861.

GOVERNOR A. G. CURTIN:

"The Ringgold Light Artillery are parading this morning with their guns for practice, have ninety men on parade, every one of them expecting to be ordered on duty for the U. S. service before they leave their guns.

H. A. LANTZ."

The Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth, as appears by the first dispatch recorded on that day as sent, answered :

HARRISBURG, April 15, 1861.

H. A. LANTZ, *Reading*:

"Dispatch received. Will answer more fully as soon as possible.

S. B. THOMAS, Dep. Sec'y."

This was followed by another dispatch from the Secretary of the Commonwealth, omitted in the record of dispatches at Harrisburg, but found transcribed in the minute book of the company.

HARRISBURG, April 15, 1861.

CAPT. JAMES MCKNIGHT:

"Bring your command to Harrisburg by first train. If any of the men need equipments, they will be provided here by the General Government. Lose no time. By order of the Governor.

ELI SLIFER."

This dispatch was received by Capt. McKnight, at 11.20 A. M., April 16. By first train after its receipt, the Ringgold Light Artillery, 101-men, took passage, fully uniformed, armed and equipped, for Harrisburg, and reached there at 8 o'clock P. M. They at once reported for duty to the Secretary of State, (the Governor being absent at Washington), who by telegram reported the Ringgold Light Artillery at Harrisburg, awaiting orders, to the Secretary of War at Washington. The Secretary of War telegraphed in answer : "Push forward the company by first trains." This telegram conveying orders to march, was transmitted by the Secretary of Commonwealth to Captain

McKnight. Orders in obedience thereto were then issued to the command, to take the train for Washington at 3 o'clock A. M., April 17. If these orders had not been countermanded, the Ringgold Light Artillery would undoubtedly have reached Washington safely in advance of all troops from Pennsylvania and elsewhere, and before the Logan Guards and the companies from Pottsville reported at Harrisburg. At midnight, however, the order to march was countermanded in the following counter-order.

HARRISBURG, April 16, 1861.

CAPTAIN JAMES MCKNIGHT:

"You will please delay your march to Washington until ordered by the Governor.
Respectfully yours,

ELI SLIFER."

This written order of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, addressed to Captain McKnight, dated April 16, 1861, so indisputably fixes the time of the arrival and the report for duty at Harrisburg by the Ringgold Light Artillery, that any cumulative evidence is wholly superfluous. If any is needed it will be found in the following extract, from the *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph*, of April 17, 1861, an evening paper published at Harrisburg :

"Last night about eight o'clock the Ringgold Artillery, Captain James McKnight, numbering 100 men, arrived. They took up quarters at Herr's Hotel. They are a fine body of men and are fully prepared and determined to do their whole duty in the present crisis. Our citizens welcomed them with cheers."

Now, permit me to interpret these proofs in the light thrown upon them by the account of the events given in Bates' History of Pennsylvania Volunteers. This writer says :

"On the afternoon of the day of the President's Proclamation for 75,000 men, the Secretary of War telegraphed the call to the Governor of Pennsylvania, and it was telegraphed by the Executive to all parts of Pennsylvania. Among the first to respond was the Ringgold Artillery, Captain McKnight, of Reading, the Logan Guards, Captain Selheimer, of Lewistown, the Washington Artillery, Captain Wren, and the National Light Infantry, Captain McDonald, of Pottsville, and the Allen Rifles, Captain Yeager, of Allentown."

The telegram from the Riuggold Light Artillery was sent on the morning of the day of the President's Proclamation, and the reply of Dep. Sec. Thomas, indicates that it reached the Executive Department at Harrisburg before the Secretary of War had telegraphed the call to the Governor. Subsequently the dispatch dated April 15, received on the 16th, was sent by the Secretary of the Commonwealth, ordering the Ringgold Light Artillery to Harrisburg, which resulted in bringing the command there on the evening of that day.

"On reporting," continues the same writer, speaking of the Ringgold Light Artillery, "at the Executive office, the Governor being absent in Washington, orders were sought from the Secretary of War, who telegraphed to push company forward in earliest trains. That order, for prudential reasons, was almost immediately countermanded by the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

I have before shown, beyond the possibility of successful contradiction, that all this occurred on the arrival of the Ringgold Artillery at Harrisburg on the evening of the 16th of April, and I will now adduce equally conclusive proofs that the Logan Guards did not reach Harrisburg till midday of the 17th and the Pottsville companies till the evening of the 17th :

[From the Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph April 17, 1861.]

"MORE MILITARY.—The Logan Guards of Lewistown arrived here this morning. Several Allegheny companies are expected here to-night."

[From the Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph, April 18, 1861.]

We give below a list of the companies that arrived last night:

Washington Artillery, Pottsville, Captain Wren, 110 men.

National Light Infantry, Pottsville, Captain McDonald, 104 men.

Allen Infantry, Allentown, Captain Yeager, 64 men."

[From Bates' History of Pennsylvania Volunteers.]

"The Logan Guards were in line and ready to march at 10 P. M. of the 16th of April, and move to the station, but for lack of transportation did not reach Harrisburg till the morning of the 17th.

"The two Pottsville Companies under marching orders left Pottsville on the 17th, and arrived in Harrisburg at eight o'clock in the evening."

I submit that I have proved these facts incontrovertibly. That the Ringgold Light Artillery of Reading, uniformed, armed and equipped, first among the companies from Pennsyl-

vania, after and under the President's call, tendered their services, were accepted by the Governor, and reported for duty at Harrisburg.

That the Ringgold Light Artillery of Reading first reported through the Executive Department to the Secretary of War as awaiting orders at Harrisburg, and received the first orders from the Secretary of War conveyed to troops from Pennsylvania under the President's proclamation.

I come now to comment briefly upon the claim for precedence made by the two companies from Pottsville, on the ground that they had offered their services to the government prior to the promulgation of the President's proclamation. The National Light Infantry alleges that the officers, by resolution of the company, tendered their services on the 11th of April to the Secretary of War, and were notified of their acceptance on the 13th of April. The Washington Artillery allege they tendered their services on the 13th of April and were accepted by the government.

No authority existed on the part of the Secretary of War by any law or provision of the Constitution of the United States to accept the offer of troops 'till the proclamation of President Lincoln on the 15th of April. That the military authorities recognized no right of precedence because of prior acceptance by the Secretary of War, was made manifest by the fact, that in the order of parade on the 4th of July, 1866, at Philadelphia, the post of honor, the right of the line, was given to the Logan Guards, to the exclusion of both companies from Pottsville, on the ground that this company had reported first for duty at Harrisburg.

The tender of services by the officers or by resolutions of a company, and the acceptance of such services, has little significance or importance. On the 16th of April, the day after the proclamation, the Secretary of the Commonwealth published in the *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph*, at Harrisburg, a list of troops comprising one or two regiments, and about fifty companies whose services had been offered and accepted by the Governor under the call of the President. Some of these troops failed to

report for duty, and in regard to others which entered into service no pretence of claim for priority of rank was set up over others which had begun their march and reported for duty at rendezvous, at earlier dates.

I may here remark that in the published list of companies accepted by the Governor, which I have mentioned, the names of the Ringgold Light Artillery from Reading and of the two companies from Pottsville appear, and the name of the Logan Guards is omitted for the reason, as appears distinctly from telegrams on record at Harrisburg, that the company was not full at the time.

This paper would be incomplete, and fail to do justice to the patriotic spirit of the gallant Ringgolds, if I neglected to place upon record the history of the corps during the three months preceding the call of the President, although what I now add has, in my judgment, no weight in the decision of this controversy.

Major James McKnight assumed the command of the Ringgold Light Artillery in August, 1850, and by his zeal and ability, aided largely by the experience and services of Sergeant George W. Durell, who afterwards succeeded him in the captaincy, had raised the company to a distinguished position among the military organizations of the State in the month of January, 1861. The character of the corps was well known to General William H. Keim, the Major General of the division, and it must be attributed to this fact that application was made by Governor Curtin, the Commander-in-chief, for their services, and to the patriotism, discipline and efficiency of the corps, that it was in condition to place itself and did place itself under orders to march upon twenty-four hours' notice, on the 21st of January, 1861.

The circumstances connected with these contingent marching orders, and with the movements of the Ringgold Light Artillery, from that date up to the time they reported for duty at Harrisburg, are so honorable to all the parties, and of so much historic interest and value, as I find them detailed and substantiated by Major McKnight in his statement dated June 14, 1870, and

transmitted to Washington, that I beg leave to append as a part, and in conclusion of this paper, that portion of it which covers these points, together with the certificate of citizens of Reading, to which he refers.

STATEMENT OF MAJOR JAMES McKNIGHT.

I commanded the "Ringgold Light Artillery" from the year 1850 until June 14th, 1861, when I was appointed to a captaincy in the 5th U. S. Artillery.

On or about the twenty-first day of January, 1861, I was visited by William H. Keim, then Surveyor General of the State of Pennsylvania, and Major General of the 5th Division, Pennsylvania Militia.

The General, first meeting me in a public place at my residence, stated that he had a subject of much importance and great secrecy in regard to which he desired to advise me, and requesting at the same time that I would suggest some place to which we could both retire, where the nature of the communication, which he was about to make to me, would be unheard by others. We then both withdrew to a private apartment.

The General then proceeded to state that the Government was in possession of facts tending to develop an intention on the part of the rebels to seize Washington on the 22nd of February, and not, as was at first supposed, upon March 4th, 1861. He came to me (he further stated) by direction and under the orders of Governor Andrew G. Curtin, Commander-in-chief of the Pennsylvania Militia, who had commissioned him to select, from the best volunteer organizations of the State, such companies as could be relied upon, if the emergency should arise, and who would be ready to move upon twenty-four hours' notice.

Upon my satisfying the General not only of the willingness, but also of the ability of my command to start whenever desired, he then and there directed me to consider myself and my command as under orders.

The General about the same time imparted similar information to other volunteer organizations of this county.

My orders, coming as they did from the Commander-in-chief of the Pennsylvania troops, were so imperative in their nature, and admitted of so little delay that I immediately set about perfecting and equipping my command for active field duty. The same day upon which my orders were received, the company was divided into squads, for the purpose of more efficient and effective drilling, which was continued uninterruptedly (save on Saturdays and Sundays) up to the day before we left for Harrisburg, April 16th, 1861. The drills were not confined to the service of the guns, and the duties incident to drivers and the care of horses; the men were also well instructed in the use of the sabre—the only legitimate arm of defense of an artilleryman when dismounted and away from his guns.

During the month of January, a number of the leading citizens having been apprised of the secret orders under which my command was placed, purchased for the use of the men one hundred overcoats, which were worn on the 22nd of February, at a general parade of the company. Upon the 15th day of April, 1861, while at drill some three miles from the city, intelligence was received of the Proclamation of the President of the United States, calling for 75,000 men.

The Governor of the State was immediately telegraphed that the "Ringgold Light Artillery" was ready to move without any delay whatever. I then suspended drill, returned to the city, and after directing a certain signal to be sounded upon receipt of orders, dismissed the command.

At 11.20 o'clock, A. M., April 16th, 1861, the following telegram was received by me:

HARRISBURG, April 16th, 1861.

To CAPT. JAMES MCKNIGHT:

Bring your command to Harrisburg by first train. If any of the men need equipments and arms, they will be provided here by the General Government. Lose no time.

By order of the Governor,

ELI SLIFER.

At noon of the same day, forty minutes after the receipt of the order, the command declared itself ready to move at 1 o'clock P. M.

A committee having been appointed to make all arrangements for the transportation, reported that after conferring with G. A. Nicolls, Gen. Supt. Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, they were advised by him to take the regular passenger train at 6 o'clock P. M., as a special, being subject to unavoidable delays, would in all probability not reach Harrisburg until after the arrival of the regular train.

Acting upon this advice, I left Reading with my command, numbering one hundred and one men, fully armed and equipped, on the evening of April 16, 1861, at 6 o'clock, reaching Harrisburg at 8 o'clock.

CERTIFICATE OF CITIZENS OF READING.

READING, Pa., May 21, 1870.

We the undersigned citizens of Reading, Penna., hereby certify, that during the month of January, 1861, information having been received by us that the Ringgold Light Artillery was ready to move to Washington, a meeting was held at which we were present. That at said meeting a fund was raised for the purpose of obtaining overcoats for the men of said company.

We further certify that said overcoats were purchased and distributed among those belonging to the said command.

JOHN McMANUS,
G. A. NICOLLS,
DAVID McKNIGHT,
EDWARD WALLACE,
HORATIO TREXLER,
H. H. MUHLENBERG,
Wm. M. HIESTER,
JAMES MILLHOLLAND,
C. H. HUNTER.

RINGGOLD LIGHT ARTILLERY,

RECRUITED AT READING, MUSTERED INTO SERVICE AT HARRISBURG, APRIL 18, 1861.

OFFICERS.

James McKnight, Captain.
Henry Nagle, First Lieutenant.
William Graeff, Second Lieutenant.
George W. Durell, First Sergeant.
Daniel Kreisher, Second Sergeant.
Henry Rush, Third Sergeant.
Jeremiah Seiders, Fourth Sergeant.
Levi J. Homan, First Corporal.
F. W. Folkman, Second Corporal.
Jacob Womert, Third Corporal.
Horatio Leader, Fourth Corporal.

John A. Hook, Bugler.

PRIVATE'S.

Ash, Solomon D.,
Anthony, James M.
Ammon, Anthony.
Ansart, Charles B.
Berger, Augustus.
Bickley, George S.
Burkhart, Reuben R.
Bouse, Harrison G.
Bowers, William W.
Bechtel, David.
Bechtel, Aaron.
Bitting, Charles A.
Coleman, Henry.
Christ, William F.
Drenkel, Amos.
Dickinson, Daniel M.
Ebling, Edward G.
Ermentrout, Benjamin F.
Eisenbeis, Henry E.
Eckert, George B.
Eben, William C.

Evans, Samuel.
Eltz, Robert.
Fleck, Henry.
Frees, Adam.
Frees, John, Jr.
Fox, Harrison.
Frantz, Christian C.
Faust, Adam.
Fix, William W.
Fox, James A.
Gehry, Addison.
Gebhart, Charles W.
Geiger, Henry.
Gries, Lemuel.
Gentzler, James H.
Hamilton, Samuel.
Herbst, William.
Huyett, Amos.
Hill, Nathaniel B.
Helms, Andrew S.
Haberacker, William.
Hessler, Jacob J.
Housel, Franklin.
Kennedy, John L.
Knabb, George W.
Koch, John D.
Leeds, Jacob.
Lutz, Harrison.
Lantz, Peter A.
Levan, Daniel J.
Leaf, George D.
Levan, Aaron H.
Loeser, Christopher.
Lauman, George S.
Leeds, Isaac S.
Levan, Charles.

- Maltzberger, Daniel.
Muhlenberg, Charles P.
M'Knight, Joseph H.
Miller, William M.
Mock, William P.
Mast, James L.
M'Ilvaine, Howard.
M'Lenegan, John H.
Neihart, Henry.
Pearson, Edward P., Jr.
Pfleger, James.
Peck, Frederick.
Phillippi, Frederick H.
Ritter, Ferdinand S.
Rush, Henry.
Rapp, William, Jr.
Rambo, Francis.
Rambo, Isaiah.
- Rhoads, George B.
Sherman, Jackson.
Shaeffer, Franklin.
Smith, Edward L.
Smeck, Franklin.
Silvis, George W.
Scull, Edward.
Spangler, Charles.
Shearer, Jonathan.
Smith, William H.
Shirey, Albert H.
Sauerbier, William.
Seyfert, Albert H.
Witman, Daniel.
Whiteside, Henry.
Yohn, Daniel S.
Yohn, John L.
Yeager, Frederick M.

